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DEPT FOR DRL/PHD CUMBERLAND

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: Independent News Does Make a Difference

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

Ref: 05 Minsk 591

¶1. (C) Under the auspices of a DRL Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) small grant (reftel), the IISEPS polling service conducted the second of six opinion polls in mid-February (septel). IISEPS conducted the first such grant in early December, and plans to conduct the third in April. [Note: IISEPS was closed by the Supreme Court in April 2005 and opinion polling is now strictly controlled by the GOB. Therefore, please strictly protect the source of this information.]

¶2. (C) As a corollary to the HRDF grant, the Czech government gave USD 18,000 to the Vyasna human rights NGO to distribute these polling results. After the first HRDF-funded grant, Vyasna distributed 92,000 copies of Belarusian Vestnik, a broadsheet newspaper containing the polling results and analysis, across the country. Police managed to seize another 8,000 copies of this paper from Vyasna before they could be distributed. Vyasna is currently attempting to distribute another 100,000 copies of this paper with the results of the February poll.

¶3. (C) As a means of confirming Vyasna's distribution, IISEPS head Oleg Manaev included a question in his February poll asking how many people had seen a copy of Belarusian Vestnik. A surprising 9.1% of IISEPS' 1,429 respondents (130 people) said they had:

Did you receive a copy of Belarusian Vestnik with material from an opinion poll conducted not long ago by independent sociologists?

Yes	9.1%
No	90.0

¶4. (C) IISEPS tabulated the polling results of those who had seen Belarusian Vestnik against those who had not, and found that those who had were somewhat more supportive of democratic change in Belarus. [Comment: Post cannot exclude that those who read Belarusian Vestnik were already more pro-democratic and inclined to reading independent press/leaflets dropped in their mailbox.]

	Belarusian Vestnik
Seen (130 ppl)	Not Seen (1299 ppl)

Which is more important, preserving the current situation in the country or change?

Preservation	47.2%	54.2%
Change	45.4	36.8

Do you trust opposition political parties?

Yes	32.9	18.5
No	49.7	59.6

In your view can there be an "Orange Revolution" in Belarus, like there was in Ukraine?

Yes	23.5	10.8
No	67.9	77.8

Has A. Lukashenko fulfilled his responsibilities as president well, and should be re-elected, or is it time to give someone else a chance?

Re-elect Lukashenko	41.2	54.9
Someone else	49.9	35.6

How do you view Milinkevich?

Very positive	15.3	5.6
Somewhat positive	32.5	25.8
Somewhat negative	21.3	22.1
Very negative	6.7	8.3
Never heard of him	7.8	21.5

How would you vote if the ballot contained these four presidential candidates?

Lukashenko	47.2	60.0
Milinkevich	22.7	15.9
Kozulin	7.1	6.3
Gaidukevich	11.1	3.9

Positive rating:

Lukashenko	48.9	58.8
Milinkevich	21.3	14.9

If you had to choose between union with Russia and joining the European Union, which would you choose?

Union with Russia	53.9	56.9
European Union	33.5	27.1

Comment

15. (C) While these differences between those who had and had not seen Belarusian Vestnik are not decisive, they do illustrate what many of our contacts have told us, that Belarusians are eager for alternative sources of information. Moreover, this information can have an effect in shaping the opinions of the Belarusian people.

KROL